



the LOS ANGELES
COUNTY HOSPITAL-
through the eyes
of the artist

an exhibition
of paintings and drawings
by May Lesser

National Library of Medicine • Bethesda, Md.

September 26, 1980 - January 23, 1981

"These are stories and paintings about medical care for the poor at a large, metropolitan, publicly supported hospital and the impact it produced upon the patients, the medical and nursing staff, and upon myself." Thus artist May Lesser, who spent three years in the mid-seventies observing the residency at the Los Angeles County Hospital, a unit of the University of Southern California Medical Center, describes her work on display at the National Library of Medicine. This is her second exhibition at the Library. Ten years ago, NLM displayed a series of prints and drawings resulting from her experience auditing medical school with the class of 1971 at the U.C.L.A. Medical School, which resulted in a book, *The Art of Learning Medicine*.

The present exhibition of some 35 selected paintings and drawings from a forthcoming book reflects the artist's sensitivity toward the effect of the overwhelming number of patients on the young, idealistic doctors at a crucial stage of their development. Their professional skills are increased but, in Mrs. Lesser's words, "their growth is slowed by frustration in dealing with so much social pathology and the community's attitude toward the poor and their physicians."

The "red-blanket" (critical) case in the Emergency Room, the intimate teaching conference in the corridor of the busy clinic, the air of death in the Intensive Care Unit, even the mountains of fresh linen waiting to be folded, all have meaning to the eye of the artist-author. In her words: "I had a hard time grasping the sheer immensity of this human institution and the work that goes on inside it. It is hard to get an overview and abstract its design, not only because of the cross-current of so many clinics, wards, and buildings, but also because of the human experiences which resonate with one's own strong feelings and emotions connected to birth, life, and dying. The sheer grind of long hours and the unending repetition of cases accurately present the setting of the large county hospital. Under these conditions the young physician gives quality medical care. What is it like to work in these conditions over many years? What is it like to become demoralized?"



Delivery (Obstetrical Unit)



Cardiac arrest (Emergency Room)



Pretty girl receives special attention
(Emergency Room)



Stroke victim

About the artist:

May H. Lesser, the daughter, sister, wife, and mother of physicians, is unique in joining together her skill as an artist with her understanding of physicians. She is a graduate of the H. Sophie Newcomb College, Tulane University, with honors in drawing. She received a master's degree in painting from the University of Alabama and did graduate work at UCLA. She was granted the Tiffany Graphic Art Award and taught etching at the University of California, Irvine.

Her work has been exhibited at the UCLA Medical Center, Tulane University, University of Miami, University of Southern California, Case Western Reserve University, Seattle Museum of Art, California State College at Long Beach, Detroit Institute of Art, Smithsonian Institution, University of Pittsburgh, National Academy of Design, George Washington University, and a number of United States embassies abroad.

Her etchings and drawings are in the permanent collection of the Weatherspoon Gallery, University of North Carolina; Oklahoma Art Center; the Ars Medica Graphic Art Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Grunwald Graphic Art Foundation, UCLA; the Cleveland Museum of Art; the New Orleans Museum of Art; and the National Library of Medicine. Her color etchings have appeared on the covers of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.





"DT's" (Emergency room)



Premature infants in isolettes (Neonatal Unit)



Operating Room



Neonatal Laboratory

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